



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN OPERATION ROLLING WHEELS

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that in El Paso, Texas, eleven individuals have been sentenced in connection with a mail fraud scheme executed to facilitate a drug trafficking and money laundering operation.

Earlier today, United States District Judge Harry Lee Hudspeth sentenced:

- Maria Elena Alderete, manager of Tagg-It Auto Licensing in El Paso and a sworn Deputy Tax Assessor Collector for El Paso County, to three years in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. She was also fined \$2,000. On April 24, 2006, Alderete pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud, money laundering and conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana;
- Ana Maria Perches, owner of Perches Bookkeeping (PB) in El Paso, to 27 months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. On April 24, 2006, Perches pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud and conspiracy to import over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana;
- Norma Monte, clerk/receptionist for Perez Bookkeeping, to 15 months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. On April 24, 2006, Monte pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud and conspiracy to import over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana;
- Amy Pearl Perez (aka Amy Pearl Palacios), Santos Perez's daughter and an employee of Perez Bookkeeping, to eight months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. On April 24, 2006, Perez pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud and Misprision of felony (concealing and not reporting the commission of a felony offense);
- Olga Cereceres, former Tagg-It employee, to three years probation. Cereceres was also fined \$500. On April 24, 2006, Cereceres pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud;
- Adrian Perez, son of Santos Perez and an employee of Perez Bookkeeping, to three years probation. On April 24, 2006, Perez pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud.

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Operation Rolling Wheels sentencings

July 19, 2006

Page 2

Yesterday, United States District Judge Harry Lee Hudspeth sentenced:

- Vilma Guzman, Tagg-It employee, to five months in federal prison plus five months home confinement followed by three years of supervised release. On September 23, 2005, Guzman pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud and Misprision of felony.
- Javier Alderete, Tagg-It employee, to five months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. On September 23, 2005, Alderete pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud and Misprision of felony;
- Joel Olague, employee of Cowboy Auto Sales in El Paso, to four months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. Olague was also fined \$500. On October 6, 2005, Olague pleaded guilty to conspiracy to import over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana;
- Rebecca Garcia Martinez, a volunteer of Twin City Insurance in El Paso, to two years probation. On September 23, 2005, Martinez pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud;
- Elizabeth Smotherman (aka Elizabeth Tanner and Elizabeth Smith), owner of Twin Worlds Insurance in El Paso, to three years probation and fined her \$500. On September 23, 2005, Smotherman pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud.

Sentencing for the remaining defendant, Santos Perez, owner of Perez Bookkeeping Service (PBS) in El Paso was continued. On April 24, 2006, Perez pleaded guilty to one count each of mail fraud and conspiracy to import over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana. As a result, Perez faces up to life in federal prison. Sentencing is expected to occur in late August.

Between January 2000 and March 24, 2004, the defendants were involved in a scheme to defraud the El Paso County Tax Assessor Collector, the Texas Department of Transportation and the government. All of the defendants—except Martinez, Smotherman and Olague—either issued, or requested the issuance of, vehicle registration stickers, Texas license plates and temporary permits based on fraudulent information and supporting documentation (vehicle identification certificates, insurance cards, drivers license photocopies and title certificates). Furthermore, the defendants admitted knowing beforehand that the fraudulently generated items would be used on vehicles to transport illegal drugs from Mexico to Texas through ports of entry in El Paso.

Maria Alderete, Vilma Guzman, Javier Alderete and Olga Cereceres accepted unauthorized fees, over and above the fees required by the Tax Assessor Collector, in exchange for providing the fraudulent licensing documentation. In addition, Martinez and Smotherman admitted to providing insurance cards to facilitate the illegal operation. Olague admitted to providing actual Texas vehicle identification certificates form VI30 “green sheets” to facilitate the illegal operation.

Operation Rolling Wheels sentencings

July 19, 2006

Page 3

Finally, from August 2002 through March 25, 2003, Maria Alderete used Tagg-It bank accounts to launder approximately \$82,000 in purported drug proceeds.

During the course of this scheme, authorities seized over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana, more than ten kilos of cocaine and over 500 grams of methamphetamine from vehicles registered by the defendants.

This Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) case was investigated by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Office of Investigations, United States Postal Inspection Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Texas Department of Public Safety and El Paso Police Department. The United States Marshals Service, El Paso County Sheriff's Office, Texas Department of Transportation and the El Paso County Tax Assessor Collector's office provided assistance in the investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Greg McDonald and Jose Luis Acosta are prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

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